FREE LEARNING AND FREE TEACHING IN THEOLOGY.

THE MODIFICATION OF DOGMA REGARDED AS A CONDITION OF HUMAN PROGRESS.

An Address

DELIVERED AT THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE SESSION 1891-92,

IN

MANCHESTER NEW COLLEGE,

AT OXFORD, OCTOBER 20th, 1891,

BY

THE REV. JOHN OWEN, B.D.,

Rector of East Anstey,

BY SPECIAL INVITATION.

WILLIAMS & NORGATE, 14, HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN, LONDON; AND 20, SOUTH FREDERICK STREET, EDINBURGH.

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The Modification of Dogma regarded as a Condition of Human Progress.

Gentlemen,

When I was honoured with the request to address you on this occasion, I was not conscious of any embarrassment in respect of a lack of appropriate subjects; mine was rather the proverbial embarrassment that arises from wealth and redundancy. Some of you, I think, are aware that for many years my interests and sympathies have been enlisted in your College, and, even more, in the work which it has set itself to perform. It is now nearly a quarter of a century since my own natural idiosyncrasy, fostered by suitable training, led me to associate myself with other writers of the "*Theological Review*," then under the editorship of the revered Charles Beard; and, from that time to this, I have never ceased to feel the warmest sympathy for every attempt to further the cause of free and liberal Theology. As a result of these sympathies and the studies prompted by them, the relation of Theological Dogma to every conceivable aspect of human thought and culture has been one of the great questions of my life and writings. Consequently as I have said, I found so many inviting themes which I should have been glad to submit to your consideration, that I experienced some difficulty in making a selection. Not a few, however, of the subjects which occurred to me appeared to be of a kind which might not improbably have already ensured their treatment by other occasional Lecturers, even if they had not formed part of your ordinary curriculum. Such was, *e.g.*, the subject of the

general growth of Theological Dogma—the laws and limits of that growth. Such was, also, the relation of Dogma to Belief—the abnormal product to the normal process—which, of course, implied an investigation into the character and energies of the human faculties. Another question was the comparison in their origin and development of Ecclesiastical and Biblical Dogmas. Another was the personal and general elements in individual dogma-growth; while another was a subject on which I have written at some length—the relation of enquiring Scepticism to Dogma. At last I chose—for reasons that will reveal themselves in the sequel—the following theme:—*The Modification of Dogma regarded as a Condition of Human Progress.*

In discussing this subject it seems expedient to begin with definition.

First, I remark that Dogma, as I regard it, is related, on the one hand, to the needs and energies of the human mind; on the other, it is related to abstract and independent Truth.

Taking the second first, Dogma is a definitive, absolute, infallible form of some alleged Truth, especially in the region of pure speculation; for on practical questions wherein the issues to be determined are compulsory, or which necessitate even immediate action, there can be no question of the inherent and absolute rights of Dogma. Hence all Dogmas—in theory, at least—start from alleged Truths. Indeed, Truth furnishes not only their source, but their credentials. It is because they claim kindred with and descent from Truth that they profess—often arrogantly and falsely—omniscience, universality, and finality, and take up an attitude of autocracy and absolution which culminates in intolerance and persecution.

On the other hand, religious Dogmas, at least most of those which we would place in that category, have a certain relation to the human mind. They attest certain intellectual and spiritual tendencies, they minister to confessed needs, they form a vehicle

for certain natural energies, so that, notwithstanding their mischievous proclivities when fully matured, they must be admitted to have at first some special utility as well as a Reason of Existence. It has often been said, and I believe with truth, that no religious belief ever attained a wide diffusion that had not some precedent fitness as a foundation, or a persuasion of usefulness as a justification in the mind of its recipients. Even the Infallibility of the Pope—the most fatuous Dogma of modern times—which was received eventually with submission by 180,000,000 Romanists, was not wholly destitute of congruity with the training and disposition of its faithful recipients. I need hardly add that this fact points to one very obvious, but sometimes forgotten lesson in our dealing with Dogmas, viz., our duty of regarding them, if only in common with eccentricities, mistakes, and superstitions that have acquired wide human currency, with the sympathetic consideration and tenderness with which all the products of man's fallible intellect and bewildering surroundings deserve to be treated.

Dogma then, we may take it for granted, claims a certain kinship with Truth. Such a claim may, of course, be wholly suppositious, or, even if real, might be one of perversion, and even of degradation. Some of you remember Douglas Jerrold's definition of Dogmatism—as philosophical as it is witty—"Puppyism full grown." I would rather say that such a growth is like a transmutation—were it conceivable—of the "harmless necessary cat" into a full-grown and savage tiger, with maturest development of teeth, claws, and generally man-devouring propensities. On some such principle as that of the proverb, "God made the country, but man made the town," we might say "God made Truth, but man devised Dogma," unless indeed the depravation of Truth, which is properly implied in Dogma, were held to suggest another apothegm of the same kind, "God made meat, but the devil sent cooks." At the same time, I think every philosophical and comprehensive mind would regard the genesis

and formation of Dogma—the transmutation of tender feelings and vague desires to rigid verbal propositions, the hardening of tendencies and subtle processes into accomplished facts, the transition of Rhetoric into Logic, as Selden phrased it—with something like sympathy, or, at all events, with forbearance and a due recognition of the natural propensities of the human mind. Dislike and disavow Dogmas as much as we may, hold aloof as much as we ought from their worst qualities and tendencies, their arbitrariness, their assumed omniscience, their finality in relation to things Infinite, and, worst of all, their arrogance and intolerance, we cannot deny that every thoughtful man has the germs, the promptings, and the materials of creeds in his own consciousness, that he possesses convictions as undeniable as his own existence, though, if he be a wise man, he will discriminate between personal and impersonal sources of Truth, and will be cautious how he transmutes individual beliefs into absolute Dogmas, and thereby arrogates for them an omniscience and universality they have no right to claim.

The outcome of what I have advanced is this;—in one form or other, convictions and beliefs, determinate conclusions of various kinds, are inseparable from human thought and research, and are inevitable to the individual thinker, as well as to the community of which he forms a part. Though easily capable of abuse in their dogmatic stage, often acting not as incentives and encouragements, but as obstacles and deterrents to freedom and progress, they yet claim their place in the economy of human thought, and in the history of Philosophy, of Science, and of every other department of human enquiry. We may liken them to milestones of a certain kind, they mark stages on our road, though they may not indicate with absolute certitude our final destination, nor the distance still to be traversed. An exhaustive history of all Dogmas, or formal beliefs, since men first began to dogmatise, tracing their origin, their growth, their fluctuations and modifications of every kind, would be a work of peculiar and

surpassing interest. To "Universal History," the record of man's outer life and progress, it would stand in the relation of soul to body. Embracing the whole vast area of human thought and speculation, it might claim to be a Natural History of the race from the standpoint of its spiritual and intellectual being. Such a record, were it feasible, would form an instructive repertory of human errors, as well as of beliefs which might claim from competent judges the designation of certainties. It would further tend to show how closely allied man's highest truth is with his most ignoble error, and how impossible it is to demarcate in every case the one from the other. Indirectly, it would reveal the various psychological tendencies, the ratiocinative processes, the intuitional and emotional influences which, among all races of men, have governed the formation and growth of human beliefs. It would afford us an instructive lesson as to the modes in which our own truths should be acquired, and the dissentient or opposed truths of others should be regarded; teaching us in the former case a reasonable and reverent Latitudinarianism, and, in the latter, a comprehensive and tolerant Catholicity.

But, I need hardly say, such a treatment of the formal beliefs of mankind would not only be beyond the compass of a lecture, it would exhaust the resources of several courses of lectures, or, which comes to the same thing, would transcend the capacities of a small library of books. My present object is far more limited. Narrower in scope, it is also restricted in material, for the Dogmas I propose considering are those that come to us by the development of Ecclesiastical Christianity, while, by their modification, I understand the critical analysis and relaxation to which they have been subjected in modern times, commencing with the Renaissance of the 14th and 15th Century; my special purpose being to prove, in relation to such modification, how it has subserved the cause of human progress and freedom.

But, before proceeding to my main task and considering the

chief causes and directions of this dogma-modification, there are a few preliminary remarks I should like to make, on—

I. The varying capacities of different Dogmas for modification.

II. The different initiatory or shaping influences which have determined the generally fixed form of Dogmas.

III. The modes, symptoms, and characteristics by which Dogmas manifest their decay, and possibly their final dissolution.

I. I do not know whether any of you have ever attempted, in considering the Evolution and History of Dogmas, some such exercise as this;—if you have, you will agree with me as to its exceeding instructiveness. First, make a list of some of the chief Dogmas or fixed doctrines which have marked the growth of Christianity from the commencement of its dogma-forming period—which I incline to place at the middle of the 2nd Century—up to the present time. Having done this, insert opposite each Dogma the number—I do not say the total, for this might, in some cases, be impossible to arrive at—of the most prominent or distinctive forms or phases it has since undergone. You would soon find, as the outcome of your exercise, more than one interesting result. For example, you would become persuaded of a truth which the most inveterate foe of Dogmas, provided he were also gifted with insight and ingenuousness, would hardly refuse to concede, viz., that the most unwarranted and excessive of Dogmas have occasionally and incidentally exercised a beneficial effect in provoking criticism and investigation. They have acted as the tyrannical behests and restrictions of political absolutism in awakening and stimulating the desire for freedom, and oftentimes in achieving the object of its craving. You will also discover that Dogmas differ largely from each other in respect of capacity for diversiform variation,—that, while some admit of an immediate fixity of statement which they have retained throughout

their history, others, notwithstanding every attempt to fix them, and fence them round with all kinds of orthodox distinctions and menaces, are distinguished by their almost numberless modifications. This is no more than an inference from the fact that, in respect of their origin and ruling principles, all Dogmas are by no means alike, though their formal grouping in creeds tends to obscure this truth. Thus, if we classify the generally-received doctrines of Christian Churches into the four divisions—(I.) Metaphysical, (II.) Metaphysico-historical, (III.) Historical or Biblical, and (IV.) Ethical—we shall find (what, indeed, we might have anticipated on independent grounds) that the more closely a doctrine is allied to Metaphysics the greater the number of phases and formal definitions it may be expected to present. Thus, taking one pre-eminent example of the first, or Metaphysical class, viz., the Doctrine of the Trinity, the various forms that Dogma has assumed are almost numberless. Most of you know Baur's stupendous work on the subject, in which he traces, throughout three closely-printed volumes of more than 900 pages each, the changes which that doctrine has undergone from its first formal enunciation at the Council of Nicæa to its latest developments among the Hegelians of the present century. The great leader of the Tubingen school treats the question from his accustomed philosophic standpoint, with no more bias than would be naturally generated by a sense of the great susceptibility of the Dogma for diversiform speculation, and his history may, therefore, be relied upon. Even if one were to narrow its somewhat broad scope, and extract from it only the explicit definitions and explanations of the Trinity that have appeared in the history of Christianty, the result would be a considerable volume. In its latest modifications since the doctrine has been taken in hand by German transcendentalists, especially Hegelians, the doctrine has become—I desire to speak of it with all due reverence—a kind of abstract Rule of Three, the Trinities of recent speculations resolving themselves into

triads of arbitrary abstractions which have as little connection with the original Dogma as the Kantian triology of "Duty, Freedom, and Immortality," or the "Liberty, Fraternity, and Equality" of French Republicanism.

But if Metaphysical Dogmas, taking their form and being from abstract speculation, betray an unusual susceptibility of modification, a similar tendency, in a lesser degree, is shown by Dogmas of the second class, the Metaphysico-historical,—I mean those in which history and abstract speculation are united in the genesis of an Article of Faith. Thus, in the Doctrine of the Person of Christ, in which Alexandrian speculation is combined with the more materialistic conceptions of Palestinian Judaism, we still trace a considerable diversity of Dogmatic form, as you may find in Dr. Dorner's huge, but rather shapeless and unphilosophical work on the Person of Christ.

In the two last classes of Dogmas I have enumerated, viz., the Historical and Ethical, there is obviously less room for variation; the formal definition of such Articles of Faith as Original Sin, Predestination and Election, has not varied much throughout their after history, though even in these some modifications of a striking kind, as we may see further on, are also observable.

Thus far I have shown, I hope, that Dogmas possess inherently a varied but considerable capacity of modification. I proceed next to prove that such a capacity must needs exist by reason of the variety of the generating and shapening influences to which they have been subjected. This is, as you will admit, too large a subject to be treated with adequate fullness in the compass of a single lecture. I can merely suggest a few salient illustrations of the diversiform influences to which we owe the definitive form of Dogmas, both in the Past and the Present. Roughly, these influences, for the most part external, seem divisible into General and Personal, the former class comprehending such agencies as the general environment, and political and hierarchical exigencies;

the latter including the personal idiosyncrasies of Ruling Potentates and Religious Teachers.

Taking, first, the environment. We are bound to admit that a certain congruity will mostly be found between a widely-diffused religious belief and the political, social, and moral condition of the people who hold it. Not only so, but we must further allow that a change in the mental and moral condition of any people will inevitably induce a corresponding change in their religious creed. Thus, with whatever amount of repulsion we regard such doctrines as Eternal Torment or Calvin's *Horrible Decretum*, we cannot deny that the most flourishing periods of such misbeliefs coincide with analogous opinions in other directions of human thought and life. Thus, the exclusiveness of Patristic and mediæval Ecclesiasticism embodied in the dictum—"*Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*" on the one hand, and the arbitrary decree of Calvinism on the other were, after all, in harmony with the political and social conditions of the middle ages. Those were times when the laws, principles, and excessive claims of Feudalism dominated in Church and State, when the abyss between the noble and the serf was hardly less wide and bottomless than the gulf that sundered those whom the Church or Calvin declared to be saved from those whom they affirmed to be unsalvable. When the authority of kings and priests was based on extravagant prerogatives, and shielded by excessive privileges,—when even trade and commerce were hampered by monopolies, exclusive grants, and restrictions of various kinds,—it was impossible then to resist either Ecclesiastical or sectarian exclusiveness on the plea of justice, because the notion of justice, in the sense of equality, was alien from the ordinary life of the people. Similarly, the power arrogated by the Church of distributing to or withholding from men the favour of heaven, could not have appeared utterly devoid of reason when the chief function ascribed to planets and stars was to forecast and watch over the destinies of individual dwellers upon earth. Moreover, the doctrine of endless

physical torments, which now revolts us by its extreme barbarity, as well as by its libel on God's character, was then sanctioned by the general atmosphere of ruthlessness, and brutal insensibility to suffering, in which men's lives were led. When the State awarded torture and death, and imprisonment worse than either, for trivial offences,—when the Church more than rivalled the savagery of the State, and punished deviations from orthodoxy with a zest and ruthlessness truly diabolical,—when the rights of the Sovereign over his subjects and the feudal lord over his vassals were so unbounded,—when, in a word, the ordinary conditions of human life and thought were so pervaded by a deadening sense of injustice and suffering, were so allied with infernal passions and principles,—it was no wonder that their alleged perpetuity in a future life hardly awakened discontent, to say nothing of resentment and antagonism.

Or, turning to another Dogma of a wholly different kind, that of Transubstantiation In its origin and early growth from the 10th to the 13th Century, it was accepted the more readily, apart from its religious sanctions, because it fell in, and was congruous, with other superstitions and modes of thought then current. When the alchymist claimed to transubstantiate lead into gold, and by his "Elixir of Life" to transmute man's mortality into immortality, when diseases were cured, and lost property found by incantations and charms, when wizards and witches changed their living forms as often and as grotesquely as they pleased, when Science was largely based on the assumption that the qualities and essences of different substances were indefinitely interchangeable, there was the less reason to question the power of the priest at the altar to transform bread and wine into veritable flesh and blood.

Such Dogma-shaping influences as I have touched upon were, of course, general; but there were others of a more special kind. There were, *e.g.*, the political influences which have so often determined the final form of single Dogmas, as well as of

creeds and formularies. As there are laws in our own statute books—and, not improbably in those of other nations—which bear witness by their form and content to the rivalry of political parties, and to the victory of one over the rest, so there are Dogmas which bear witness to the dissensions of Bishops, the hardly-attained majorities of Councils, and even, sometimes, to the political expediences and court-intrigues of Emperors and Kings. Just as Napoleon said, with his irreverent cynicism, that "Providence invariably sided with the strongest battalions," so Selden remarked of the decisions of Church Councils, "They talk, but blasphemously enough, of the Holy Ghost being President of their general Councils, when the truth is, the odd man is still the Holy Ghost." In the Arian controversy, *e.g.*, which preceded and followed the so-called orthodox definition of the Council of Nicœa, the influences brought to bear on the doctrine of the Trinity are not far removed from the wretched details of a *chronique scandaleuse,* and even the authorised form of the doctrine in the Nicœan formulary partakes of the character of a political compromise; and, coming to the later dogmatic settlements of modern times, the form which the Protestant Reformation of Germany finally took was determined partly by the personal idiosyncrasies of its leaders, partly by the political exigencies, mostly local and temporary, of its princely supporters. So, also, the doctrinal settlement of our own National Church bears similar traces of the personal characteristics of Henry VIII. and Elizabeth, and Archbishops Cranmer, Parker, and Whitgift. Indeed, few things in the History of the Dogmas of Christendom are at once more repulsive and disquieting than the unworthy means by which Potentates and Councils have achieved their designs and coerced unwilling minorities to accept their decisions. The very latest example of this, I need hardly remind you, was the Vatican Council of 1870. The unscrupulous methods by which the Jesuits and their Ultramontane allies coerced, by bribes and menaces, the Anti-Infallibists of the Council, constitute, in

my opinion, the greatest ecclesiastical scandal of the present century. On this part of our subject I may further suggest, in passing, that the very fact of Dogmas having been the products of single minds acting under the inevitable restrictions of human individuality, the necessary limitations of time, place, and other external and temporary conditions, is in itself an abundant reason why they should always be considered open to re-investigation, and, if need be, to question and rejection. Under no conceivable hypothesis could it be admitted that determinations of truth arrived at by an individual or a community, religious or other, should be regarded as having power to bind humanity for ever after.

The effect of political, dynastic, and personal influences on religious beliefs is, however, a large subject, which I have no time to treat at greater length. It is to these influences, taking the form of Aspirations, that we are indebted for the Dogma that has exercised more influence than any other on the religious development of Christian Europe—I mean the doctrine of the Jewish Messias. Every impartial inquirer into the subject will admit that in its inception, as well as its aftergrowth, it was indebted to the national disasters of the period after the Captivity, while the ultimate failure of the dynastic and terrestrial expectation took, in the century before Christ, a more spiritual and vaguely-celestial form, and developed into the Eschatology and Millenarianism which we find current later on, and which in some forms may be said to exist in our own day.

I have already glanced at the Dogma-moulding influences of individuals when put in operation by the medium of Ecclesiastical Councils or Political measures; but a still greater and more independent power of the same kind must be ascribed to the great religious leaders of Christendom, such men as St. Paul, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Ignatius, Loyola, Wesley, &c. In this case we have the personal idiosyncracy of one man, possibly the outcome of hereditary prejudice or defective training, giving

the final form to a Dogma which after-generations are bidden, on his sole authority, to accept as, *e.g.*, the Pauline doctrine of Election. In this case we have the anomaly that religious belief held to be obligatory on the world at large should depend on the *ipse dixit* of a single teacher, perhaps not much above his fellows in spiritual insight or intellectual power, however much he may be superior to them in force of character and self-assertion.

But there is one more Dogma-shaping influence I must note before leaving this part of my subject, and that is, the mutual power of associated Dogmas among each other, whether by limitation or enlargement. Thus, it is impossible not to see that the Logos doctrine exercised a most important effect on the Dogma of the Incarnation—the metaphysics of the question, so to speak, helping to give shape to its physical and historical aspect. Again, the assigning to the Deity different attributes which, at first, were no more than deductions from the laws of the Universe, but which soon took the form of separate or separable abstractions, had an influence on the orthodox definition of Deity as consisting of three persons, or hypostases. Once more the long-recognised infallibility of the Church, and the gradual concentration of its authority in the Papal See, gradually paved the way for the most fatuous Dogma which the brain of man ever conceived—the Infallibility of the Pope.

But I need pursue no further this part of my theme. What I have advanced will be enough to show, not only that Dogmas possess inherently varying capacities for modification, but that the same capacities also exist in virtue of the different influences to which they are of necessity subject.

III.—We have next a further point to be considered, which is, however, no more than a deduction from what I have already said, viz.:—If Dogmas are so susceptible of modification and change, like all other changeable things, they must be liable to decay and death.

Some of you, I dare say, know Theodore Jouffroy's Essay in

his "Melanges Philosophiques," entitled "*Comment des Dogmes finissent.*" It was an Essay that achieved considerable celebrity in France in the third decade of the present century, partly on account of the author's philosophic eminence, but chiefly on account of the combined audacity of the subject and its treatment. In a purely ideal manner, but with the impartiality of a philosopher, and the insight of a religionist and believer in Dogmas, Jouffroy considers the various stages and symptoms of Dogma decadence. He regards them as having a lifetime of their own, marked like that of other animate beings by birth, growth, maturity, and old age. He lays especial stress on the fact that Dogmas expire not by violent attack from outside, but by gradual decay, by atrophy and inanition, in other words, by the natural feebleness of old age. These signs of failing vitality a Dogma betrays when it becomes otiose, effete, non-effective; when men cease to notice or talk about it except, perhaps, to marvel at its longevity; when it drops out of men's ordinary creeds and religious interest, like a public man or cause that is laid at last on the shelf. What especially strikes the present-day reader of the Essay is its Idealistic treatment, in the entire absence of concrete examples or illustrations of his thesis. He speaks of Dogmas as abstract beings, or entities perfectly well known, having common characteristics and peculiarities, above all sharing a common vitality and susceptibility to growth, maturity, and decay; but he does not name a single Dogma. We are left to infer that the extinct Dogmas he has in his mind are those of the "out-worn creed" of "Paganism," though there is also room for the suspicion that the semi-animate condition of some Christian beliefs in the France of the earlier decades of this century also came within the range of his purview, and furnished materials for his conclusions.

Doubtless the great defect of Jouffroy's treatment is, that it is too abstract and ideal, too much *in nubibus*, too far removed from terrestrial facts and actualities. Besides which it suffers from

the fundamental defect that it places all Dogmas on the same plane of Truth, and regards them as possessing an equal claim on human belief.

But this, I need hardly point out to you, is a mistake. Dogmas are no more all alike than religions or sciences are all alike, or than metaphysical concepts or the varied products of the Physical Universe are all alike. They differ largely in origin, in form, in vitality, in direction of incidence, in importance. Some of them are born of the primal, ineradicable instincts of humanity, from the eternal relations of the human soul and its surroundings, from the natural affinity of man's spirit and intellect with Divine and Eternal Truth; and these, most assuredly, are immortal. Others, on the contrary, betray an inferior parentage and descent. They are the outcomes of human ignorance and blindness, the creatures of Ecclesiastical ambition and greed and arrogance, and we must hope and desire that they are, in their nature and destiny, mortal.

But, whether immortal or mortal, the Dogmas of each class are liable, in varying degrees, to changes of form, content, and definition; both are susceptible of what I have termed Modification, *i.e.*, change and readjustment. In point of fact, this quality is the inseparable concomitant and condition of man's progress. To pull down old barns and build greater is the educational law of the individual as of the race. To allow Truth to expand "at her own sweet will," even when the expansion entails, as it needs must, the destruction of older limits and boundary walls, is the imperative obligation she imposes on all her votaries. Hence, if we regard our present attainments collectively as a fair city with solid buildings and stately temples, we must remember that, like Rome, it is a modern city, whose foundations are laid in the monumental dust of the Past; that her Churches are based on the foundation of ancient temples, whose religion and worship have long since perished; that her houses and palaces are erected on the ruins of streets which have long ceased to re-echo the

voices and footsteps of living men. Everywhere in the history of human thought and belief we come upon the ashes of extinct fires, we tread the cold and hard lava-crust which was once a stream of living and glowing incandescence. Our best and most cherished beliefs—like noble scions of obscure ancestors—are due to doctrines and modes of Faith which we now know to have been insufficiently based, if not positively untrue. The two Dogmas, *e.g.*, partly borrowed from Judaism, which gave the earliest and mightiest impulse to the spread of Christianity, have for centuries become extinct, viz., the Restoration of the Davidic Kingdom and the Immediate coming of Christ to Judgment. Incidentally, no doubt, the conspicuous failure of these hopes had the effect of directing men's attention to other aspects and merits of Christianity, and so helped to base it on a broader, firmer footing; but, as far as the Dogmas themselves are concerned, we now know them to have been illusions.

On a large scale, the chief illustrations of the decay of religious beliefs in the History of Christendom are the following: (1) The gradual downfall of Paganism by the rise and spread of Christianity; (2) the abandonment of Romanist Dogma, in its most distinctive features, by the European nations, which threw off the Papal yoke in the 16th Century; to which may be added (3) the considerable Dogma-modification now taking place among the thoughtful and cultured classes of Europe.

A careful consideration of the characteristics common to these movements suffices to show, not only the extreme and protracted tenacity with which religious beliefs, however foolish and superstitious in themselves, or however much they may have vanished from the creeds of the thoughtful and cultured, continue to be held by the unthinking and sequacious herd, but also reveals a remarkable tendency of old and decaying Dogmas to assume other and new forms. The beliefs of Judaism, on the one hand, of Paganism on the other, were adopted, with some little disguise, 1st, by the Christian Apostles; 2nd, by the rulers of the Church,

when it had developed into a hierarchial society. Not the least important of the questions we have still to determine is the amount of undue colouring and possible perversion the simple teaching of Christ may have received from these extraneous sources. The extent to which Ecclesiastical Christianity is permeated with the beliefs and usages of Pagan idolatry is probably unsuspected even by those who have turned their enquiries in this direction. In the middle of the last century (1732) a work on this subject was published, called *Roma Antiqua et Recens.* The work is one which I commend to your notice, and the more readily inasmuch as it is now easily procurable, having been republished two years ago. An introduction to the work gives the following summary of its scope and contents:—

"Taking every department of modern ceremonial it proves, by abundant illustration and unquestionable evidence, that all are copied from heathen models; that the variations from heathen models are almost insignificant; and that the leading teachers of the Roman Church openly avow the sources from which Roman ceremonial has been taken, and argue that authority has been given to the Church to make such adaptations. The Pope is but the "Pontifex Maximus" of Paganism; the Orders of Ecclesiastics are the same as found in Pagan temples; the Mass, the processions, the robes, the festivals, the saints, the churches, the relics, the images, the prayers for the dead, are so precisely a reproduction of Pagan ceremonial, that it is only the truth to call modern Romanism and Ritualism a Christianized Paganism."*

Making due allowance for the narrowness of strong partizanship, it seems to me impossible to contest this representation as a whole. The light it throws on some of our current beliefs and usages is certainly startling. Taking a single instance—the puerile stress which men, not wholly devoid of sanity, place on such mere externalities as the Eastward Position, cannot plead a

* On this subject reference may be made to the late Dean Stanley's volume, on "Christian Institutions," wherein it is discussed with the Author's well-known learning and Christian liberality.

high justification, however worthy in other respects, by their derivation from the sacrifices of Paganism. Vitruvius gives this direction on the subject: "Let those who sacrifice towards the altars look to the East part of the heavens, as also the statue which is to stand in the temple, for it is necessary that the altars of the gods be turned to the East."

No doubt there is a further aspect of this easy transference of religious ritual from Paganism to Christianity, viz., that it served to veil deeper changes of belief and of Dogma. The heathen were more ready to adopt nominally new doctrines, when the ritual which symbolized them was the same as that to which they had been accustomed. Indeed, we know that for five or six centuries after Christ, among the Paulicians and other recognised Christian sects, rites of Paganism continued to be celebrated as Christian, without even a change of name being deemed necessary.

In dealing with decaying or extinct Dogmas, it is not always easy to determine accurately their symptoms and forms of decay. As a kind of rough summary, we may say that a Dogma is losing its effectiveness, that it has possibly started on a course of decay which may lead to extinction, when from some cause, known or unknown—

I. It is neglected.

II. When it is conspicuously out of harmony with the best thought and speculation of the time. As examples of this, we may take the belief in the Millennium, in the six days' Creation of the World, in the Eternity of Hell-torments, &c.

III. When the orthodox form and content of the Dogma is diluted, or assumes varieties of meaning all more or less alien to its original signification. Under this head I would class the Verbal Inspiration of the Bible, Calvin's main Dogma of Predestination, the Personality of the Devil, the Pauline Scheme of Redemption—all of which may, in relation to our foremost speculation, be termed waning beliefs.

IV. When it is transmuted into an analogous Dogma in another direction of thought, as, *e.g.*, the transference of the theological doctrine of Original Sin into the scientific theory of the transmission of hereditary tendencies and faculties; or the rehabilitation of the second coming of Christ, by expanding it into the Christianization of the world.

I submit this classification of the modes in which Dogmas betray their relaxed hold on the minds of their believers, not as perfect or exhaustive. It may also be that some Dogmas come under more than one of the classes I have enumerated. Thus, the Dogma of substitution, or the vicarious atonement of Christ may be included under the first three classes. 1st, we may say of it—it is no more than what its most unscrupulous defenders do say of it—that it is neglected; 2ndly, that it is hopelessly out of harmony with our more enlightened notions of justice and morality; and 3rdly, that it has latterly received from every section of the religious thought of Christendom more or less re-adjusted and modified meanings.

On this point, however, I must utter a word of caution. That Dogmas become old and decrepit, that they may become disused and discarded, that they may decay and die, are facts; but they are facts which exercise a disquieting effect on too ardent and unphilosophical minds. These are impatient of the continued moribund existence of beliefs which they regard as dead and buried. Like Socialists or Political Radicals, they would at once make a clear *tabula rasa* of laws and institutions which they dislike, but the injustice of which may not really extend beyond their own restricted interests, even if it extends so far. But a genuine Philosopher or comprehensive Religionist will be careful to treat all beliefs that have once exercised legitimate sway over the minds of men, with sympathetic candour and impartiality. Hence, whatever be our own attitudes to certain Dogmas, whether of dissidence or assent, we must allow for the circumstances under which they were formed, and the mental

character and training of those who have accepted them. A Dogma is often the interpretation which the human mind, in its blind groping after Truth, places on some otherwise inscrutable mystery of the Universe. It is an Essay in Theological Speculation, and the potential determinations in the region of speculation are, as you know, boundless. Thus, most of us stand in severe aloofness from the "horrible decree" of Calvinism. We rightly regard it as a libel on God's character, and a denial, self-evidently false, of man's freedom and responsibility; but we cannot deny that certain aspects of the Laws of the Universe seem to look in the direction of a fatalism which we are compelled to regard, from the customary standpoint of special Providence, as unjustifiable and immoral. Or again, while we rightly consign the Dogma of the Eternity of Hell-torment to the limbo of discarded beliefs—a more merciful destiny than that which it designed for its own victims—we dare not deny that Sin and Retribution occasionally have, even by the laws and processes of Nature, an indelible character and apparently an eternal duration.

There is one more reason why disused and decayed Dogmas should be regarded with kindly interest. Even when wholly discarded from current beliefs, Dogmas, once widely diffused, must needs possess for ever after an archaic and historical importance. Like the animal remains we now discover and treasure as petrified bones, or the skeletons of extinct species, they bear silent witness to a vitality which, though now passed away, may at one time have possessed no small influence and importance. Take such a Dogma, *e.g.*, as that which formed the energising spirit of the Christian Church in the first century—the belief in the immediate coming of Christ. It is now extinct, hardly more than a petrified fragment of a dead faith; but it tells us of a vivid hope and fervent aspiration whose profound depths we are not able to gauge. It bears witness to a vitality and energy which might challenge comparison with the most quickening beliefs of our time. It tells of an over-mastering

power, on those who accepted and believed it, with which we have nothing to compare. True, the Dogma is long dead, but can any thinking man deny that its bony skeleton, so to speak, is still eloquent, that, although dead, it still speaketh?

Having thus far treated the general aspects of Dogma-modification, I pass to its special manifestation in the modern history of Christendom, though I have only time for the briefest consideration of this part of my subject.

If we take a broad general survey of Dogma-change in modern Europe from the time of the Renaissance to the present day, and mark carefully the chief causes which the process has taken in the past and is taking in the present, we shall find such causes and directions to be mainly threefold, viz.:—

I. Change in the source, incidence, and range of Authority.

II. A broadening of the sphere of human knowledge.

III. A steady growth and wider diffusion of human sympathies.

On the first point I must beg not to be misunderstood. As long as omniscience is a prerogative denied to man, there must be, in various directions of human knowledge, the assertion of extraneous authority, the coercive sway of a knowledge and experience beyond our grasp. But our notions of authority have undergone a profound change, not only in religion, but in politics and science as well. The authority which was once autocratic and imperious is now compelled to produce its credentials and substantiate its claim. The authority which was general—the prerogative of communities, political or religious—is now largely particular or individual. The authority which claimed to overrule verification and experience must now submit to their processes and abide by their results. We may still defer to a knowledge confessedly higher than our own, to a power whose credentials we have ourselves verified, but we no longer bow to authority on subjects wherein its claimants have no better opportunities of knowledge than ourselves, or to a power that declines to be tested. Hence the authority claimed by Churches,

as well as that asserted by secular rulers, is now required to vindicate its claims, to reconcile its assertions and privileges with the independent judgments of reason and conscience, or, if the authority be a book, then it must submit to criticism and historical investigation, just like any other document largely weighted with human interests. The general result of this change in the conception and methods of authority is this,—at the present moment, all Dogmas alike may be said to be at the bar of popular investigation, all are required to produce their credentials, all are compelled to bring forward their witnesses and justify their claims; not only so, but all are obliged to adopt a higher and more hardly-attained standard of evidence than was needed in days gone by.

But, remember, this change in the source and incidence of authority has, for every thoughtful man, the highest educational value. The progress of a given tenet or religious belief, in the mind of a thinker, from one authority to another, from the Bible, let us say, to Nature and History, or from Ecclesiastical creeds to the verdict of Reason and Conscience, is a process instinct with instruction, both as an educational training, and as an introspective discipline. Thoughtful men no longer believe in God, or in Revelation, or in a future life, on the bare testimony of churches and creeds, but on the independent research and final verdicts of their reason and conscience. In many cases, the particular Dogma so treated has been strengthened by such a change in its arbitrament, in others it has been weakened; but the general result to the individual, assuming him to push his inquiries with reverence, caution, and honesty, is undoubtedly Progress by the modification of Religious Beliefs.

The same truth obtains in the change of the authoritative sanctions of religious beliefs in Churches. More and more we find, both in pulpit discourses and in our best religious literature, a conception of Deity more or less Naturalistic and Scientific, substituted for a purely Theological one. Instead of the arbitrary

will of an omnipotent but capricious Being, and an anthropomorphic conception of his Providence, we have, with ever greater frequency, references to laws of Nature—laws which, created or sanctioned by His wisdom, can never be superseded or transgressed by it. We are also aware of a similar change of authority in other directions. Indeed I may say, with no danger of contradiction, that the chief concern among the so-called orthodox Churches at present is, the re-adjustment of new Dogmas and modes of thought with the decaying beliefs of the past, so as to preserve unimpaired the principle of Authority and Truth, without which no Church could stand.

II. Coming now to the second cause and direction of Dogma-modification—that induced by the increase and expansion, the gradual "broadening down" of human knowledge—the effect of this on the changed aspects of Dogmas is unquestionable. Most of our current religious beliefs own their inception to special causes and restricted conditions. What can be more special and narrow, *e.g.*, than the traditional origin of the doctrine of Original Sin, or St. Paul's theory of the Scheme of Redemption? Even Christianity itself, in its historical origin, is not free from the restrictions of Time and Place, and Language and Nationality, and Idea, how true soever it may be and is that such limitations are inevitable. Indeed, not a little of the work of the free churches has been to counteract these restricted aspects—to universalize what was local and Palestinian, to humanize what was Jewish, to expand to all time what was contracted to the bounds of a few years, and to make obligatory on all thinking men, of every time and place, the precepts and truths, once reserved to a favoured few, which have approved themselves amenable to such expansion. Taking our Religion at its starting point, and allowing its congenital limitations to operate eternally, the only conceivable environment suited to its narrow range would be an earth which composed the universe, and a particular race of men which comprised the sum total of humanity. In this respect

Theology has followed in the track of Science, her conceptions have become expanded and universalized in her course. Contrast the difference between the Genesis narrative of the Creation in six days, and the slow, deliberate march of the law of Evolution for hundreds of centuries; or, again, consider the first notion of Deity current in the Old Testament—the mere tribal God, the petty Deity of a petty nation—one out of many such, who ruled that fragment of the earth's surface that lay between Dan and Beersheba, and had his residence, like an ordinary potentate, in the capital city. Note how such a conception expands, not only in range, but in ethical and spiritual value, until, in the New Testament, we attain to the idea of the Universal Father, in whom we live and move and have our being. Even this stage is, in point of expansion, too limited, because it represents Deity as altogether terrestrial, and regards the stars as mere appendages to earth.

Compare both of these stages of thought with the overpowering grandeur of the conception of Deity which is taught us in Modern Astronomy. Indeed, the testing of Truth by its infinite expansion in space and time, I regard as one chief function of Astronomy and Science, with reference to theological and kindred controversies. Who dares suppose that our puerile contentions about sacerdotal vestments, or the Eastward position, or Apostolical succession, or the thousand controversies that have agitated and convulsed Christendom, could possess the least significance or vitality outside the limits of our own petty planet? Let any man, with some knowledge of Stellar Astronomy, place Milton's heavenly conclave in some one of the fixed stars, whose light has taken centuries to arrive at our small globe, and the whole scheme of "Paradise Lost," which has so leavened our modern Theology, becomes wholly annihilated by its own littleness and absolute insignificance.

III. The remaining cause and direction of Dogma-modification is one that is, perhaps, more effective than any of the rest. It is

the growth, in depth and intensity, in range and inclusiveness, of human sympathy; the more fully-charged feelings of tenderness and gentleness, of love and forgiveness even for the sinful and erring, the emotions of pity and compassion, the desire to avert and soothe human suffering, the stern dislike of whatever causes misery or degradation to our fellow-men; the cumulative many-sided sentiment, in short, which in the past has extirpated slavery, reduced the punishment of death to its minimum, filled every Christian land with hospitals and asylums, and, in the present, is gradually building up a body of opinion which must eventually render war impossible. That feeling, I say, allied with an inborn sense of justice, which has recently become quickened in every direction, is protesting more and more loudly against theological Dogmas based upon obvious partiality and injustice. It is lifting its voice against the arbitrary unfairness of Predestination and Election, against the penal consequences of Original Sin, against a Physical Hell and its Eternity, against the claims of Churches and sacerdotalists to bind and loose, against the obligation to ritual observances, to fasting and maceration, against whatever debases man before God, or adds to the inevitable trial and imperfection of human life.

Such an influence is not only operative in the present, as a tacit but powerful solvent of dogmatic creeds, but is destined to act with still more effectiveness in the future. Hence we may with confidence expect, in time, the gradual extinction from most Christian creeds of all theories, dogmas, beliefs, and opinions irreconcilable with the infinite goodness and undeviating justice of our heavenly Father.

But it is time to conclude my Lecture.

The relation of its subject to the occasion which has called us together you, I think, must long since have discerned. If the dogmatic forms, expressions, and definitions of Christian Truth are largely modifiable, if they are apt to change with the changing conditions of human progress and culture, then it is obvious that

man's highest religious training should be—what it is the special boast of your College that it here is—free and undogmatic. Conceive the opposite assumption. Imagine, for a moment, that the Dogmas of most Christian creeds were irrefragable and eternal truths, that they exhausted all human knowledge and beggared all human imagination, that they were in demonstrated harmony with history, with reason, with conscience, with every well-authenticated test that could be brought to bear upon them, what, on that theory, would be the true conception of education? Surely the dogmatic system which most of our educational foundations foster and practise. Nothing under such an hypothesis could well be simpler. All the teacher need do would be to fill his pupils' minds to repletion with these eternal verities, allowing no question, dissent, or investigation, which, under such an assumption, only the most wanton disregard for Truth could even justify.

This, I say, has not been the system identified with your College. With a truer insight into the characteristics and needs of the human intellect, your "pious Founders" never considered your institution as a mere store-shop for acquirements, where definite Truths and ready-made Dogmas might be retailed, as so many wares, duly assorted, weighed, and packed, over a counter. They did not regard the mind as a passive receptacle, or a mere vessel of capacity which your Professors are required to fill: but as an organism endowed with independent life, and with varied powers and faculties fitted not only to acquire, but to generate and originate Truth, which it is the noble function of your teachers to stimulate and train, to cultivate and make fruitful.

That in initiating and carrying out such a free and enlightened policy of Education Manchester New College stands alone, that your undogmatic training is not that of most foundations in this University, or in England, is probably true, but it is an isolation of which you may fairly boast. Not only are the collegiate foundations around you professedly dogmatic while you are free, there is a further distinction. These foundations at their founding

had regard, primarily, to the Past, and to the dogmatic determinations of that Past. Their intention was to perpetuate it, to fix the Past, as it then existed, to all coming ages. They aspired to mark, as it were, by the visible symbolism of buildings and battlements, towers and temples, the everlasting solidarity of ancient and particular phases of Christian Truth. They asserted themselves as perennial embodiments of the creeds and institutions of olden time. Aristotelianism and Scholasticism were then the ruling philosophies; Mediæval Catholicism the only conceivable form of Religion. It was impious and heretical even to prospect a time when Scholasticism would cease, when feudal institutions and ideas would fade away, when Aristotle would no longer be regarded as the epitome of all human knowledge, when the Pope of Rome would cease to control the eternal and temporal interests of Christendom.

I need not remind you how completely "the whirligig of Time has brought its revenges,"—how the ideas of solidarity, of fixity, of eternal permanence, as the attributes of research, have been falsified by the event;—how completely the dynamic, as distinct from the static conception of human progress and enlightenment has been demonstrated by History. In due time Cartesianism overthrew Scholasticism, Modern Science dethroned Aristotle, Political Freedom ousted Feudalism, the Reformation supplanted Mediæval Catholicism;—every phase and aspect of Truth which most of these ancient foundations were meant to perpetuate have succumbed and given place to others.

Your Foundation—different from all those that have preceded it in this University—is based on other principles. Freedom, and not Fixity; Reason, not arbitrary and extraneous Authority; Truth, and not Dogma; Progress, not Stagnation, are your noble watchwords. You have learnt the lesson of History—a lesson, confirmed by the very nature of the human intellect and the conditions of its energies, that we can no more fetter Truth in her eternal forward march than we can stay the motion of sun

or planet,—that we can no more arrest her growth, or limit it to one particular stage, than we can stem the incoming flow of the ocean, or render for ever motionless the eternal progression of time.

But while the change of thought, of method, of mental attitude to theological and philosophical questions, so conspicuous in the History of our Collegiate Foundations, must be taken as a justification of the stand-point of your College in the past, you have other attestations pointing in the same direction.

1. The free undogmatic teaching, which you have adopted, was, in essentials, the method of Ancient Greece in the days of her noblest culture. Then, too, men were taught by Socrates and Plato, not so much what to think, as how to think; not the inevitable goal, as much as the method and direction of intellectual progress. Then, too, the essential freedom of man's thought was recognised; then, too, was the attempt made to discriminate between the pearl and its setting, between truth as the object of man's eternal search, and the dogmatic embodiment which might be its well or ill-fitting vesture or expression at a particular time.

2. Your free teaching possesses also the attestation of the profoundest thinkers and educational theorists, whether of classical or subsequent times. In this country, *e.g.*, it has had the emphatic approval of all our most famous philosophers, beginning with John Locke and coming down to Matthew Arnold and Herbert Spencer, in our own days.

3. It may also be said to possess *valeat quantum* recognition and sanction derivable from the free undogmatic polity of our English Church, for however true it may be that the Church is creed-bound and dogmatic in theory, in practice and in the legal definitions of creeds and formularies she claims to be one of the freest Churches in Christendom.* Born of a compromise between

* The delimitation of speculative and doctrinal Freedom enjoyed at this moment by the Clergy of the National Church would be impossible, even if it

the Sacerdotalism of the middle ages and the freedom and Puritanism of the Reformation, she has, for the most part, consistently maintained that position as the only possible basis for a National, liberal, broadly-comprehensive Church, by deliberately relaxing her confessions, formularies, and terms of subscription, so as to include every phase of the National Christianity, with a bold and wise disregard of the sometimes narrower intent of the framers of her formularies, and even of the primary sense of the words in which those formularies are expressed.

Nor is it only the Past which thus directly and indirectly testifies to the wisdom of your educational polity. It has, still more, the unmistakable sanction and approbation of the Present.

To-day we have been engaged in the formal laying the Foundation Stone of a building dedicated to the teaching of Theology without Dogma. Never was there, in my judgment, in the history of our English Christianity, a more auspiciously opportune moment for such an undertaking than the present. In every direction, look wheresoever we may, in the practical administration of every Christian church, we discern the same phenomena—a relaxation of Dogmatic forms and Articles of Faith. There is a less insistence on purely speculative beliefs,

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were expedient. When Ecclesiastical just as civic freedom is perpetually "broadening down" from precedent to precedent, it is not easy to determine, at any specific time, its actual area. Those who wish to ascertain its limits, or who suppose that those limits ought to be ascertainable, are recommended to procure and peruse the chief Ecclesiastical decisions of the present century, especially those on Doctrinal, *not* Liturgical questions. They are also recommended to notice the modifications in the terms of subscription to the XXXIX. Articles which have been made within the last 50 years. It must be remembered—to quote the words of a shrewd writer—"The State always asserts implicitly a creed or doctrine by its legislation, even when most careful to avoid doing so in an explicit manner." But the whole subject is one for a volume, not for a foot-note to an Address; and those really interested in the question are recommended to read the several works that have been published on the changes and growth of Religious opinion in the Church of England.

especially when they conflict with our ordinary notions of Justice and Humanity. Christians of every type are becoming more convinced of the wisdom of Locke's advice: "In all matters of speculation let your conclusions be few and large." The usual persuasives to orthodox belief are failing in force and frequency. There is no speculative Dogma that any Christian church, or any sane minister of a Christian church, would now assert, with the horrible menace of the Athanasian Creed, that unless held in an orthodox form the errant believer would, "without doubt, perish everlastingly." And this relaxation in respect of speculative Dogma is common to all Christian churches alike. The English Church has deliberately modified her terms of subscription, so as to imply general concurrence, instead of a separate belief in every Article of her Creeds, or every single one of her Articles. The churches of Scotland, both Established and Free, have recently made considerable concessions in the formulas of their faith, and at this moment the Creed of Calvin is disappearing from those churches, not slowly or gradually, but "by leaps and bounds." On the Continent, we are told, a similar relaxation is in progress. Among the Protestants of France, and the Lutherans of Germany, the relaxation of Dogma has proceeded to an excess which threatens more than one type of reaction. A similar process is discernible among our Nonconformists. Tacitly, and in part unconsciously, our Congregationalists, Methodists, Baptists, are all engaged in quietly shelving, or else in openly rehabilitating old and decaying Dogmas. An interesting illustration of this change was afforded a few weeks since at the reopening of Bala Theological College, when the President explained the suspected decadence of Evangelicalism in Wales, curiously enough, by saying "that the College had gradually and almost unconsciously modified Puritan doctrines into harmony with every new revelation of Truth that broke on the minds of their leaders;" so that it would seem that my present theme, "The Modification of Dogmas as a Condition of Human Progress," had

been already discovered and acted on by the most narrow and Dogmatic—reputedly so, at least—of all our English Religious sects.

That this relaxation and modification of Religious Dogma are destined to continue in the future, and to exercise no small transforming influence on our popular Christianity, I entertain no doubt, nor have I, personally, any fear for the result. The tendencies indicated appear to me to point in the direction not of the destruction, but of the reformation of genuine Christianity; a return to the simplicity, the directness, the undogmatic and practical teaching of the Founder himself.

Nor need this exclude other and profounder sources of speculative and learned research, which the future may have to reveal to us. There are, rely upon it, still broader vistas of Truth to be explored, still deeper reaches of Divine and human knowledge to be attained, which they will best explore and soonest attain who are least hampered by the impedimenta of Dogma. You, at least, professors and students of Manchester New College, start on your quest with the profession of mental Freedom as your heritage, and her insignia and title as the inscription on your banner, claiming your place in the vanguard of Truth's Army, and accepting each stage of her onward progress as your successive rallying point.

Whatever further Revelations the Future may have for humanity, however much the highest Theology of our time may become modified by the advance of science, you are free to recognise and receive that larger light. You need not ask yourselves, at least as a condition of precedent reception, does the new Truth wholly agree with the old? You need not test its acceptableness solely by your present standpoint of Faith and Knowledge. You may be surprised at the disclosure, but at any rate you are free, after due verification, to accept it. You need not fear that any Revelation of the Future will narrow your purview of Truth. To all far-sighted men Truth's ocean has been

infinite in the Past, and its boundaries are not likely to be curtailed in the Future.

I, at least, must hope and pray that your College, as it has been true to its mission in the Past, will be true to its higher destiny in the Future; that it will form a centre-point of Free Thought and Energy, round which undogmatic and liberal spirits will gather. If it asserts and occupies this high position, as I have no doubt it will, it will prove a blessing not to this University only, but to the highest Religious culture of England itself.

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